

MPA

M O N T A N A
P R E S E R V A T I O N
A L L I A N C E

EXHIBIT 1
DATE 3.22.07
SB 284

March 21, 2007

Testimony on SB 284 – Best Place First

I am pleased to be here to speak on behalf of expanded funding for tourism and heritage in Montana. For two decades, MPA has been working to save and protect Montana's historic places, traditional landscapes and cultural heritage. The bill before you today offers a meaningful way to not only help communities, neighbors and friends to preserve their heritage, but it also promises to boost local economies.

SB 284 funds our cleanest, most community-oriented industry – heritage tourism. When you boil it down, this bill is about sharing the *best* of who we are with the outside world, and in turn using the proceeds to keep us working and to preserve our heritage. SB 284 supports our tourism partners who help grow Montana's economy, and it boosts our state's most cherished heritage programs – Montana's Historical Society, Heritage Commission, State Parks, and for the first time, our Cultural Trust.

There are other new partners who are invited into the circle through SB284, and I would like to focus on them – the local heritage programs – the local museums, the Tribal Tourism alliance and those who operate the non-profit venues and private heritage businesses in every town in Montana. The good news for them will be funds to help run local programs and real money for Historic Properties: grants for Historic Brick-and-Mortar projects, for rural heritage and for stewardship.

Unlike many other states (we rank 49th), Montana really doesn't have many in-state funds for such activities. At MPA we are asked every month for sources of funding assistance. Currently, we can point people to tax credits or highly competitive federal and foundation funds, but there is next to nothing for the owner of the century barn, the small town commercial building or the aging schoolhouse.

SB 284 will answer that need, and it is large. Just last year, for example, when the State Historic Preservation Office offered three \$5,000 grants for barn preservation, they had 125 applicants.

Tourism promotes the best our downtowns have to offer, and historic preservation stimulates local growth in measurable ways. This is critical support for our state's fledgling Main Street communities that in just one year demonstrated an expansion of over \$5 million and more than a hundred new jobs in 6 pilot communities.

At MPA we know the power of tourism to stimulate local business, take the example of the Hands of Harvest Craft Trail. This program joins local farmers, ranchers, historic museums, craftspeople and artists to promote Montana products and rural businesses. It is such a success that we are now following their model in SW Montana, where people from nine communities are growing a network of their own. SB 284 holds out funding for efforts like these, while recognizing the importance of these local efforts.

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You don't have to be a history buff to notice that historic preservation can be a great stimulus to local economies, just witness the renaissance in places such as downtown Billings, Philipsburg and Butte, Montana. Preservation projects generate an average of \$16 for each dollar spent, and heritage tourists on average spend more, stay longer and patronize local businesses to a higher degree than the average traveler.

In the end, SB 284 is an investment in our future. The money spent to strengthen Montana tourism will come back to us, while the investment to preserve our heritage will pay off in ways that fiscal analysts cannot begin to measure.

This is a great bill, long overdue. We encourage your hearty support.

Thanks so much for all you do on behalf of our beloved state,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Chere Jiusto".

Chere Jiusto
Executive Director